

LOVE'S LOGIC

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"We love Him because He first loved us."
1 John 4:19.*

THIS is a great doctrinal truth, and I might with much propriety preach a doctrinal sermon from it, of which the sum and substance would be the sovereign grace of God. God's love is evidently prior to ours: "He first loved us." It is also clear enough from the text that God's love is the cause of ours, for "We love Him because He first loved us." Therefore, going back to old times, or rather before all time, when we find God loving us with an everlasting love, we gather that the reason of His choice is not because we loved Him, but because He willed to love us. His reasons, and He had reasons (for we read of the counsel of His will), are known to Him, but they are not to be found in any inherent goodness in us, or which was foreseen to be in us. We were chosen simply because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. He loved us because He would love us. The gift of His dear Son, which was a natural result upon His choice of His people, was too great a sacrifice on God's part to have been drawn from Him by any goodness in the *creature*; it was not possible for the highest piety to have deserved so vast a benefit as the gift of the only begotten. It was not possible for anything in man to have merited the incarnation and the passion of the Redeemer. Our redemption, like our election, springs from the spontaneous self-originating love of God, and our regeneration, in which we are made actual partakers of the divine blessings in Jesus Christ, was not *of* us, nor *by* us; we were not converted because we were already inclined that way, neither were we regenerated because some good thing was in us by nature. Rather we owe our new birth entirely to His potent love which dealt with us effectually, turning us from death to life, from darkness to light, and from the alienation of our mind, and the enmity of our spirit into that delightful path of love in which we are now traveling to the skies!

As believers on Christ's name we "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The sum and substance of the text is that God's uncaused love, springing up within Himself, has been the sole means of bringing us into the condition of loving Him. Our love to Him is like a trickling stream, speeding its way to the ocean because it first came from the ocean; all the rivers run into the sea, but their floods first arose from it; the clouds that were exhaled from the mighty main distilled in showers and filled the water brooks. Here was their first cause and prime origin, and as if they recognized the obligation, they pay tribute in return to the parent source. The ocean love of God, so broad that even the wings of imagination could not traverse it, sends forth its treasures of the rain of grace which drop upon our hearts, which are as the pastures of the wilderness; they make our hearts to overflow, and in streams of gratitude the life imparted flows back again to God! All good things are of You, great God; Your goodness creates our good; Your infinite love to us draws forth our love to You.

But, dear friends, I trust after many years of instruction in the doctrines of our holy faith, I need not keep to the beaten doctrinal track, but may lead you in a parallel path in which the same truth of God may be seen from another point. I purpose to preach an *experimental* sermon, and possibly this will be even more in accordance with the run of the passage, and the mind of its writer than a doctrinal discourse. We shall view the text as a fact which we have tested and proved in our own consciousness. Under this aspect the statement of the text is this—a *sense of the love of God to us is the main cause of our love to Him*. When we believe, know, and *feel* that God loves us, we as a natural result, love Him in return; and in proportion as our knowledge increases, our faith strengthens, and our conviction deepens that we are really beloved of God, we from the very constitution of our being are compelled to yield our hearts to God in return. The discourse of this morning, therefore, will run in that channel. God grant it may be blessed to each of us by His Holy Spirit!

I. At the outset we will consider THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF LOVE TO GOD IN THE HEART.

There are some graces which in their vigor are not absolutely essential to the bare existence of spiritual life, though very important for its healthy growth, but love to God must be in the *heart*, or else there is no grace there whatever. If any man loves not God, he is not a renewed man. Love of God is a mark which is always set upon Christ's sheep, and never set upon any others. In enlarging upon this most important truth, I would call your attention to the context of the text. You will find in the 7th verse of this chapter that love to God is set down as being a necessary *mark of the new birth*. "Everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God." I have no right, therefore, to believe that I am a regenerated person unless my heart truly and sincerely loves God; it is vain for me, if I love not God, to quote the register which records an ecclesiastical ceremony, and say that this regenerated me. It certainly did no such thing, or the sure result would have followed. If I have been regenerated I may not be perfect, but this one thing I can say, "Lord You know all things; You know that I love You." When by believing we receive the privilege to become the sons of God, we receive also the nature of sons, and with filial love we cry, "Abba, Father." There is no exception to this rule! If a man loves not God, neither is he born of God. Show me a fire without heat; then show me regeneration that does not produce love to God, for as the sun must give forth its light, so must a soul that has been created anew by divine grace display its nature by sincere affection towards God! "We must be born-again," but you are not born-again unless you love God. How indispensable, then, is love to God.

In the 8th verse we are told also that love to God is a *mark of our knowing God*. True knowledge is essential to salvation. God does not save us in the dark; He is our "light and our salvation." We are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created us. Now, "he that loves not knows not God, for God is love." All you have ever been taught from the pulpit; all you have ever studied from the Scriptures; all you have ever gathered from the learned; all you have collected from the libraries—all this is not knowledge of God at all unless you love God, for in true religion, to love and to know God are synonymous terms. Without love you remain in ignorance—ignorance of the most unhappy and ruinous kind. All attainments are transitory; if love is not as a salt to preserve them, tongues must cease and knowledge must vanish away; love alone abides forever; this love you must have or be a fool forever. All the children of the true Zion are taught of the Lord, but you are not taught of God unless you love God. See, then, that to be devoid of love to God is to be devoid of all true knowledge of God, and so of all salvation.

Further, the chapter teaches us that love to God is the *root of love to others*. The 11th and 12th verses say, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another...If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us." Now no man is a Christian who does not love Christians; he who being in the church, is yet not of it heart and soul is but an intruder in the family! But since love to our brothers and sisters springs out of love to our one common Father, it is plain that we must have love to that Father, or else we shall fail in one of the indispensable marks of the children of God. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." But we cannot truly love the brethren unless we love the Father; therefore, lacking love to God, we lack love to the church, which is an essential mark of grace.

Again, keeping to the run of the passage, you will find by the 18th verse, that love to God is a chief *means of that holy peace* which is an essential mark of a Christian. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:1), but where there is no love there is no such peace, for fear, which has torment, distresses the soul. Therefore love is the indispensable companion of faith, and when they come together, peace is the result. Where there is fervent love to God, there is set up a holy familiarity with God, and from this flows satisfaction, delight, and rest. Love must co-operate with faith and cast out fear so that the soul may have boldness before God. Oh Christian, you cannot have the nature of God implanted within you by regeneration; it cannot reveal itself in love to the brotherhood; it cannot blossom with the fair flowers of peace and joy unless your affection is set upon God! Let Him, then, be your exceeding joy; delight yourself also in the Lord. O love the Lord you, His saints!

We also see, if we turn again to John's Epistle and pursue his observations to the next chapter and the third verse, that love is the *spring of true obedience*. "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." Now a man who is not obedient to God's commandments is evidently not a true be-

liever. Although good works do not save us, yet being saved believers are sure to produce good works. Though the fruit is not the root of the tree, yet a well rooted tree will in its season bring forth its fruits. So, though the keeping of the commandments does not make me a child of God, yet, being a child of God, I shall be obedient to my heavenly Father; but this I cannot be unless I love God. A mere *external* obedience, a decent formal recognition of the laws of God, is *not* obedience in God's sight; He abhors the sacrifice where the heart is not found; I must obey because I love, or else I have not in spirit and in truth obeyed at all. See then that to produce the indispensable fruits of saving faith there must be love to God, for without it, they would be unreal, and indeed impossible! I hope it is not necessary for me to pursue this argument any further. Love to God is as natural to the renewed heart as love to its mother is to a baby. Who needs to reason a child into love? As certainly as you have the life and nature of God in you, you will seek after the Lord. As the spark, because it has in it the nature of fire, ascends aloft to seek the sun, so will your new-born spirit seek her God from whom she has derived her life. Search yourselves, then, and see whether you love God or not; put your hands on your hearts, and as in the sight of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, answer Him! Make Him your confessor at this hour—answer this one question—"Do you love Me?" I trust very many of you will be able to say—

"Yes, we love You and adore!"

"Oh, for grace to love You more."

This much was necessary to bring us to the second step of our discourse. May the Holy Spirit lead us onward.

II. You see the indispensable importance of love to God—let us now learn THE SOURCE AND SPRING OF TRUE LOVE TO GOD. "We love Him because He first loved us." love to God, wherever it really exists, has been created in the bosom by a belief of God's love to us. No man loves God till he knows that God loves him, and every believer loves God for this reason first and chiefly, that God loves him. He has seen himself to be unworthy of divine favor, yet he has believed God's love in the gift of His dear Son, and he has accepted the atonement that Christ has made as a proof of God's love. And being satisfied of the divine affection towards him, he of necessity loves his God.

Observe, then, that love to God does not begin in the heart from any disinterested admiration of the nature of God. I believe that after we have loved God because He first loved us, we may so grow in grace as to love God for what He is. I suppose it is possible for us to be the subjects of a state of heart in which our love spends itself upon the loveliness of God in His own person; we may come to love Him because He is so wise, so powerful, so good, so patient, so everything that is lovable! This may be produced within us as the ripe fruit of maturity in the divine life, but it is never the *first spring* and fountain of the grace of love in any man's heart. Even the Apostle John, the man who had looked within the veil and seen the excellent glory beyond any other man, and who had leaned his head upon the bosom of the Lord, and had seen the Lord's holiness and marked the inimitable beauty of the character of the incarnate God—even John does not say, "We love Him because we admire Him," but, "We love Him because He first loved us." Brothers and sisters, if this kind of love which I have mentioned, which is called the love of selfless admiration, were required of a sinner, I do not see how he could readily render it. There are two gentlemen of equal rank in society, and the one is not at all obliged to the other; now they, standing on an equality, can easily feel an impartial admiration of each other's characters and a consequent indifferent affection, but I, a poor sinner by nature sunk in the mire, full of everything that is evil, condemned, guilty of death so that my only desert is to be cast into hell, am under such obligations to my savior and my God, that it would be idle for me to talk about an indifferent affection for Him since I owe to Him my life and my all! Besides, until I catch the gleams of His mercy and His loving-kindness to the guilty; His holy, just, and righteous character is not loveable to me—I dread the purity which condemns my defilement, and shudder at the justice which will consume me for my sin! Do not, O seeker, trouble your heart with nice distinctions about disinterested love, but be content with the beloved disciple to love Christ because He first loved you!

Again, our love to God does not spring from the self-determining power of our will; I greatly question whether anything does in the world—good or bad. There are some who set up the will as a kind of Deity—it does as it wills with earth and heaven, but in truth the will is not a master but a *servant*! To the sinner his will is a slave, and in the saint, although the will is set free, it is still blessedly under bonds to God. Men do not will a thing because they will it, but because their affections, their passions, or their

judgments influence their wills in that direction. No man can stand up and truly say, "I, unbiased and unaided, will to love God, and I will not to love Satan." Such proud self-assuming language would prove him a liar! The man would be clearly a worshipper of himself! A man can only love God when he has perceived some reasons for doing so, and the first argument for loving God, which influences the intellect so as to turn the affections, is the reason mentioned in the text, "We love Him because He first loved us."

Now, having thus set the text in a negative light, let us look at it in a more positive manner.

It is certain, brothers and sisters, that faith in the heart always precedes love. We first believe the love of God to us before we love God in return, and oh what an encouraging truth of God this is! I, a sinner, do not believe that God loves me because I feel I love Him, but I first believe that He loves me, sinner as I am, and then having believed that gracious fact, I come to love my benefactor in return. Perhaps some of you seekers are saying to yourselves, "Oh, that we could love God, for then we could hope for His mercy." That is not the first step; your first step is to believe that God *loves you*, and when that truth is fully fixed in your soul by the Holy Spirit, a fervent love to God will spontaneously issue from your soul, even as flowers willingly pour forth their fragrance under the influence of the dew and the sun! Every man that ever was saved had to come to God not as a lover of God, but as a *sinner*, and to believe in God's love to him as a sinner. We all wish to take money in our sacks when we go down hungry to this Egypt to buy the bread of life, but it must not be—heaven's bread is given to us freely, and we must accept it freely, without money, and without price! Do you say, "I do not feel in my heart one good emotion; I do not appear to possess one good thought; I fear I have no love to God at all." Do not remain in unbelief until you feel this love, for if you do, you will never believe at all! You ought to love God, it is true, but you never will till you *believe* Him, and especially believe in His love as revealed in His only begotten Son.

If you come to God in Christ, and believe this simple message—"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," you shall find your heart going out after God. "Whoever believes in Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Do you believe this? Can you now believe in Jesus, that is, *trust* Him? Then Christ died for you! Christ, the Son of God, in your place, suffered for your guilt! God gave His only Son to die for you! "Oh," says one, "if I believed that, how I would love God!" Yes indeed you would, and that is the only consideration which can make you do so; you, a sinner, must take Christ to be your savior, and then love to God shall spring up spontaneously in your soul, as the grass after showers. Love believed is the mother of love returned! The planet reflects light, but first of all it receives it from the sun; the sunflower turns its face to the orb of day, but first the sunbeams warm and woo it; you shall turn to God, and delight in God, and rejoice in God, but it must be because you first of all *believe*, and *know*, and confide in the love of God to you! "Oh," says one, "It cannot be that God would love an unloving sinner, that the pure one would love the impure, that the ruler of all would love His enemy." Hear what God says—"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, for the heavens are higher than the earth; so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." You think that God loves men because they are godly, but listen to this—"God commends His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Think of His "great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." God has love in His heart towards those who have nothing in them to love! He loves you, poor soul, who feel that you are not loveable; loves you who mourn over a stony heart which will not warm or melt with love to Him. Thus says the Lord—"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins. Return unto Me, for I have redeemed you." O that God's gracious voice this morning might so call some of His poor wandering ones that they may come and believe His love to them, and then cast themselves at His feet to be His servants forever!

Beloved, rest assured that in proportion as we are fully persuaded of God's love to us, we shall be affected with love to Him. Do not let the devil tempt you to believe that God does not love you because your love is feeble, for if he can in any way weaken your belief in God's love to you, he cuts off or diminishes the flow of the streams which feed the sacred grace of love to God! If I lament that I do not love God as I ought, that is a holy regret, but if I, therefore, conclude that God's love to me is less because of this, I deny the light because my eye is dim, and I deprive myself also of the power to increase

in love. Let me rather think more and more of the greatness of God's love to me, as I see more and more my unworthiness of it; the more a sinner I am, let me the more fully see how great must be that love which embraces such a sinner as I am! And then, as I receive a deeper sense of the divine mercy, I shall feel the more bound to gratitude and compelled to affection. O for a great wave of love to carry us right out into God's ocean of love!

Observe, beloved, day by day the deeds of God's love to you in the gift of food and raiment, and in the mercies of this life, and especially in the covenant blessings which God gives you! Note the peace which He sheds abroad in your hearts, the communion which He vouchsafes to you with Himself and His blessed Son, and the answers to prayer which He grants you. Note well these things, and if you consider them carefully, and weigh their value, you will be accumulating the fuel on which His love feeds its consecrated flame. In proportion as you see in every good gift a new token of your Father's love in that proportion will you make progress in the sweet school of love. Oh, it is heavenly living to taste God's love in every morsel of bread we eat; it is blessed living to know that we breathe an atmosphere purified and made fragrant with divine love; that His love protects us while we sleep, hanging like a silken curtain all around our bed, and that love opens the eyelids of the morning to smile upon us when we wake. Ah, even when we are sick, it is His love that chastens us; when we are impoverished, His love relieves us of a burden; His love gives and takes, it cheers and it smites. We are compassed about with His love, above, beneath, around, within, without! If we could but recognize this, we would become as flames of fire, ardent and fervent towards our God!

Knowledge and observation are admirable nurses of our infant love, and the soul grows rich in love to God when she rests on the bosom of divine loving-kindness. You who are tossed about with doubts and fears as to whether you are now accepted or shall persevere to the end, you can scarcely guess the ardors of heart which inflame those saints who have learned to cast themselves wholly upon Jesus, and know beyond a doubt His immutable love. Whether I sink or swim, I have no hope but in Christ, my life, my all—

*"I know that safe with Him remains,
Protected by His power,
What I've committed to His hands
Till the decisive hour."*

And in proportion as I am thus Scripturally confident, and rest in my Lord, will my love to Him engross all my heart and consecrate my life to the Redeemer's glory.

Beloved, I desire to make this very clear; that to feel love to God we must tread along the road of *faith*. Truly, this is not a hard or perilous way, but one prepared by infinite wisdom; it is a road suitable for sinners, and indeed, saints must come that way, too. If you would love God, do not look within *you* to see whether this grace, or that is as it ought to be, but look to *your God*, and read His eternal love, His boundless love, His costly love, which gave Christ for you; then shall your love drink in fresh life and vigor! Remember wherever there is love to God in the soul, it is an argument that God loves that soul! I remember meeting once with a Christian woman who said she knew she loved God, but she was afraid God did not love her. That is a fear so preposterous that it ought never to occur to anybody! You could not love God in deed and in truth unless He had shed abroad His love in your heart in a measure. But on the other hand, our not loving God is not a conclusive argument that God does not love us—else might the sinner be afraid to come to God! O loveless sinner, with heart unquickened and chill, the voice of God calls even *you* to Christ! Even to the dead in sin, His voice says, "Live." While you are yet polluted in your blood, cast out in the open field to the loathing of your person, the Lord of mercy passes by and says, "Live." His mighty sovereignty comes forth dressed in robes of love, and He touches you, the unlovable, the loveless, the depraved degraded sinner, at enmity with God—He touches you in all your alienation, and He lifts you out of it, and makes you to love Him—not for your own sake, but for His name's sake, and for His mercy's sake! You had no love at all to Him, but all the love lay in Him alone, and therefore He began to bless you, and will continue to bless you world without end, if you are a believer in Jesus! In the bosom of the eternal are the deep springs of His love.

III. This leads us, in the third place, to consider for a moment THE REVIVAL OF OUR LOVE. It is sadly probable that there are in this house some who once loved God very earnestly, but now they have declined, and have become grievously indifferent. God's love to us never changes, but ours too often

sinks to a low ebb; perhaps some of you have become so cold in your affections, that it is difficult to be sure that you ever did love God at all. It may be that your life has become lax, so as to deserve the censure of the church; you are a backslider, and you are in a dangerous condition. Yet, if there is indeed spiritual life in you, you will wish to return! You have gone astray like a lost sheep, but your prayer is, "Seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments." Now, note well that the cause which originated your love is the same which must restore it! You went to Christ as a sinner at first, and your first act was to believe the love of God to you when there was nothing in you that evidenced it. Go the same way again! Do not stop, my dear brothers and sisters, to pump up love out of the dry well within yourself! Do not think it possible that love will come at your bidding; if a man could give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be abhorred. Think of the Lord's *unchanging* grace and you will feel the springtime of His love returning to your soul. The Lord still reserves mercy for the sinful; He still waits to be gracious; He is as willing to receive you now that you have played the prodigal, as He was to have retained you at home in the bosom of His love. Many considerations ought to aid you, a backslider, to believe more in the love of God than you ever did, for think what love it must be that can invite you to return—you who after knowing so much, have sinned against light and knowledge; you, who after having experienced so much, have given the lie to your profession! He might justly have cut you down, for you have cumbered the ground long enough.

Surely, when Israel went astray from God, it was a clear proof to her of Jehovah's love when He graciously said, "They say if a man puts away his wife, or she goes from him, and becomes another man's, shall he return to her again?" Why the answer in every bosom is, "No!" Who would love a wife who had so polluted herself? But thus says the Lord, "You have played the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto Me." What matchless love is this! Hear yet more of these gracious Words which you will find in the Third chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the Lord. And I will not cause My anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever." "Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Can you hear these words without emotion? Backslider! I pray you take the wings of God's love to fly back to Him! But I hear you inquiring, Will He still receive me? Shall I be once more—

***"To the Father's bosom pressed,
Once again a child confessed?"***

It shall be so! Does He not declare that He is God and changes not, and therefore you are not consumed? Rekindled are the flames of His love in the backslider's bosom when he feels all this to be true; he cries, "Behold, we come to You, for You are the Lord our God."

I pray you, then, any of you who are conscious of gross derelictions of duty, and wanderings of heart; do not ask Moses to lead you back to Christ—he knows the way to Sinai's flames, but not to Calvary's pardoning blood! Go to Christ Himself at once! If you go to the law, and begin to judge yourself; if you get the notion that you are to undergo a sort of spiritual quarantine; that you must pass through a mental purgatory before you may renew your faith in the savior, you are mistaken! Come just as you are, bad as you are, hardened, cold, dead as you feel yourselves to be; come even so, and believe in the boundless love of God in Christ Jesus, and then shall come the deep repentance; then shall come the brokenness of heart; then shall come the holy jealousy, the sacred hatred of sin, and the refining of the soul from all her dross! Then indeed all good things shall come to restore your soul, and lead you in the paths of righteousness! Do not look for these first—that would be looking for the effects before the cause; the great cause of love in the restored backslider must still be the love of God to him, to whom he clings with a faith that dares not let go its hold! "But," says one, "I think it is very dangerous to tell the backslider to believe in God's love; surely it will be gross presumption for him so to believe." It is never presumptuous for a man to believe the truth of God—whether a statement is comfortable or uncomfortable, the presumption does not lie in the matter itself, but in its *untruthfulness*! I say again, it is never presumptuous to believe the truth; and this is the truth—that the Lord loves His prodigal sons still, and His stray sheep still, and He will devise means to bring His banished back again, that they perish not. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Remember here that the mo-

tive power which draws back the backslider is the cord of God's love, which makes him feel he must go back to God with weeping and repentance, because God loves him still.

What man among you this morning has a son who has disobeyed him and gone from him, and is living in drunkenness, and in all manner of lust? If you have in anger told him so that he doubts it not, that you have struck his name out of your family, and will not regard him as a child any longer, do you think that your severity will induce him to return to you in love? Far from it! But suppose instead thereof, you still assure him that you love him? Suppose he knows that there is always a place at your table for him, and a bed in your house for him; yes, and better still—a warm place in your heart for him? Suppose he sees your tears, and hears your prayers for him; will not this draw him? Yes, indeed, if he is a son! It is even thus between your God and you, O backslider! Hear the Lord as He argues your case within His own heart: “My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they called to the Most High, none at all would exalt Him. How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man.” Surely, if anything will draw you back, this will! “Ah,” says the wandering son, “my dear father still loves me. I will arise and go to him; I will not vex so tender a heart; I will be his loving son again.” God does not say to you prodigals, who once professed His name, “I have disowned you, I have cast you away,” but He says, “I love you still, and for My name's sake will I restrain my wrath that I cut you not off.” Come to your offended Father, and you shall find that He has not repented of His love, but will embrace you still!

IV. Time fails, but I must speak for a little, time or no time, upon the fourth point—THE PERFECTING OF OUR LOVE TO GOD.

Beloved, there are few of us who know much of the deeps of the love of God. Our love is shallow—ah, how shallow! Love to God is like a great mountain; the majority of travelers view it from afar, or traverse the valley at its base; a few climb to a halting place on one of its elevated spurs from where they see a portion of its sublimities. Here and there an adventurous traveler climbs a minor peak, and views glaciers and Alps at closer range; fewest of all are those who scale the topmost pinnacle, and tread the virgin snow. So in the Church of God every Christian abides under the shadow of divine love—a few enjoy and return that love to a remarkable degree, but there are few, in this age, sadly few, who reach to seraphic love, who ascent into the hill of the Lord to stand where the eagle's eye has not seen, and walk the path which the lion's whelp has never trod—the high places of complete consecration and ardent self-consuming love of God! Now, mark you, it may be difficult to ascend so high, but there is one sure route, and only one, which the man must follow who would gain the sacred elevation. It is not the track of his works, nor the path of his own actions, but this, “We love Him because He first loved us.” John and the apostles confessed that thus they attained their love, for the highest love that ever glowed in human bosom there was no source but this—God first loved that man! Do you not see how this is? The knowledge that God loves me casts out my tormenting dread of God, and when this is expelled, there is room for abounding love to God. As fear goes out, love comes in at the other door, and so the more faith in God the more room there is for His soul-filling love.

Again, strong faith in God's love brings great enjoyment; our heart is glad, our soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness when we know that the whole heart of God beats towards us as forcibly as if we were the only creatures He had ever made, and His whole heart were wrapped up in us! This deep enjoyment creates the flaming love of God of which I have just now spoken. If the ardent love of some saints often takes the shape of admiration of God, this arises from their familiarity with God, and this familiarity they never would have indulged in unless they had known that He was their friend. A man could not speak to God as to a friend unless he knew the love that God has toward him. The more true his knowledge, and the surer, the more close his fellowship.

Beloved brothers and sisters, if you know that God loves you, then you will feel grateful. Every doubt will diminish your gratitude, but every grain of faith will increase it; then as we advance in grace, love to God in our soul will excite desire after Him. Those we love we long to be with; we count the hours that separate us—there is no place as happy as that in which we enjoy their society. And so love to God produces a desire to be with Him, a desire to be like He is, a longing to be with Him eternally in heaven, and this breaks us away from worldliness. This keeps us from idolatry, and thus has a most

blessedly sanctifying effect upon us, producing that elevated character which is now so rare, but which, wherever it exists, is powerful for the good of the church, and for the glory of God. Oh that we had many in this church who had reached the highest platform of piety! Would God we had a band of men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit—strong in the Lord and in the power of His might! It may help those who aspire to mount high in grace if they keep in mind that every step they climb, they must use the ladder which Jacob saw; the love of God *to us* is the only way to climb to the love of God!

And now I must spend a minute in putting the truth of my text to the test. I want you not to listen to me so much as to listen to your own hearts, and to God's Word, a minute, *if you are believers*. What is it we have been talking about? It is God's love TO US. Get the thought into your head a minute—"God loves *me*—not merely bears with me, thinks of me, feeds me, but *loves me*." Oh, it is a very sweet thing to feel that we have the love of a dear wife, or a kind husband; and there is much sweetness in the love of a fond child, or a tender mother; but to think that *God* loves me—this is infinitely better! Who is it who loves you? God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty, all in all; does He love *me*? Even ME? If all men, and all angels, and all the living creatures that are before the throne loved me, it were nothing compared to this—the infinite loves ME! And who is it that He loves? ME! The text says "us." "We love Him because He first loved us." But this is the *personal* point—He loves me, an insignificant nobody, full of sin, who deserves to be in hell! I, who love Him so little in return—God loves ME! Beloved believer, does not this melt you? Does not this fire your soul? I know it does if it is really believed. It must! And how did He love me? He loved me so that He gave up His only begotten Son for me, to be nailed to the tree, and made to bleed and die. And what will come of it? Why, because He loved me and forgave me—I am on the way to heaven, and within a few months, perhaps days, I shall see His face, and sing His praises! He loved me before I was born; before a star began to shine He loved me, and He has never ceased to do so all these years! When I have sinned He has loved me; when I have forgotten Him He has loved me; and when in the days of my sin I cursed Him, yet still He loved me! And He will love me when my knees tremble, and my hair is gray with age, "Even to hoar hairs" He will bear and carry His servant. And He will love me when the world is on a blaze, and love me forever, and forever! Oh, chew the cud of this blessed thought! Roll it under your tongue as a dainty morsel. Sit down this afternoon, if you have leisure, and think of nothing but this—His great love wherewith He loves you, and if you do not feel your heart bubbling up with a good matter; if you do not feel your soul yearning towards God, and heaving big with strong emotions of love to God, then I am much mistaken. This is so powerful a truth, and you are so constituted as a Christian as to be worked upon by this truth, that if it is believed and felt, the consequence must be that you will love Him because He first loved you. God bless you, brothers and sisters, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 4:1-5.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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